

IN THE CLAIMS

For the convenience of the Examiner, all claims have been presented whether or not an amendment has been made. The claims have been amended as follows:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A computer-implemented method of providing merchandise return labels for enabling a customer to ship a package containing one or more items previously acquired from a merchant during a unique transaction, comprising the steps of:

accessing item data representing at least one detail about the item;

accessing transaction data representing at least one detail including an identification of the transaction associated with the item;

accessing customer data representing at least one detail about a customer associated with the transaction including a shipping origin;

accessing package data representing at least one detail about the package in which the item is expected to be shipped;

using a computer operated by the merchant from whom the item was acquired or a specialized returns center associated with the merchant to process returns to correlate the item data, transaction data, customer data, and package data, with a set of stored business rules to determine coding to be printed on a return shipping label; wherein the set of stored business rules specify how packages are to be shipped from the customer to a returns center and represent guidelines for determining choice of carrier, shipping destination, shipping rate, and package disposition for shipment from the customer to the returns center;

in response to correlating the item data, transaction data, customer data, and package data with the set of stored business rules specifying how packages are to be shipped, using the computer operated by the merchant from whom the item was acquired or the specialized returns center associated with the merchant to generate a **first** machine readable code for the return shipping label for shipment from the customer to the returns center, wherein the data represented by the **first** machine readable code comprises a plurality of data points, at least a first of the plurality of data points included in the **first** machine readable code representing at least the shipping origin of the package and at least a second data point in the **first** machine readable code representing the identification of the transaction;

in response to correlating the item data, transaction data, customer data, and package data with the set of stored business rules specifying how packages are to be shipped from the customer to the returns center, using the computer operated by the merchant from whom the item was acquired or the specialized returns center associated with the merchant to format the return shipping label, such that the return shipping label contains the first machine readable code and complies with shipping label specifications of the choice of carrier, the first machine readable code not associated with the carrier and in addition to a second carrier-specified machine readable code also present on the shipping label; and

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, scanning the first machine readable code by the merchant or by the specialized returns center to correlate the first machine readable code with one or more business rules for performing returns processing for the merchant associated with the transaction.

2. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the item data identifies an item type.

3. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the item data identifies an item value.

4. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the transaction data is a transaction identifier.

5. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the transaction data is a transaction date.

6. **(Cancelled)**

7. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the customer data represents customer preferences, at least one customer preference comprising a customer-selected choice of carrier, and wherein the method further comprises:

using the computer operated by the merchant from whom the item was acquired or the specialized returns center associated with the merchant to format the return shipping label as required by the customer-selected choice of carrier.

8. **(Currently Amended)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the customer data identifies the merchant as a payee of shipping costs, and the method further comprises:

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, scanning the first machine readable code by the merchant or by the specialized returns center to identify the merchant as the payee of shipping charges; and

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return and identifying the merchant as the payee of shipping charges, calculating the shipping charge due to the carrier, the shipping charge based on the cost of shipping the package from the shipping origin associated with the customer to the merchant or the specialized returns center.

9. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the package data represents package weight, and the method further comprises:

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, calculating a shipping charge due to the carrier, the shipping charge based on the package weight and the cost of shipping the package from the shipping origin associated with the customer to the merchant or the specialized returns center.

10. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the package data represents package size, and the method further comprises:

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, calculating a shipping charge due to the carrier, the shipping charge based on the package size and the cost of shipping the package from the shipping origin associated with the customer to the merchant or the specialized returns center.

11. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising:
accessing shipping rate data; and
in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, calculating a shipping charge due to the carrier, the shipping charge based on the shipping rate data and the cost of shipping the package from the shipping origin associated with the customer to the merchant or the specialized returns center.

12. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising:
accessing carrier center location data; and
using the computer associated with the merchant or the specialized return center to format the return shipping label to include a carrier center location closest to the merchant or the specialized returns center as the shipping destination such that the package is delivered to carrier center location and picked up by the merchant or the specialized returns center.

13. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 12, wherein the carrier center location closest to the merchant or the specialized returns center is a bulk mail center.

14. **(Currently Amended)** Software for providing merchandise return labels for enabling a customer to ship a package containing one or more items previously acquired from a merchant during a unique transaction, the software embodied in a memory and comprising programming operable when executed by a computer to:

access item data representing at least one detail about the item;

access transaction data representing at least one detail including an identification of the transaction associated with the item;

access customer data representing at least one detail about a customer associated with the transaction including a shipping origin;

access package data representing at least one detail about the package in which the item is expected to be shipped;

correlate the item data, transaction data, customer data, and package data, with a set of stored business rules to determine coding to be printed on a return shipping label; wherein the set of stored business rules specify how packages are to be shipped from the customer to the returns center and represent guidelines for determining choice of carrier, shipping destination, shipping rate, and package disposition for shipment from the customer to the returns center;

in response to correlating the item data, transaction data, customer data, and package data with the set of stored business rules specifying how packages are to be shipped, generate a **first** machine readable code for the return shipping label for shipment from the customer to the returns center, wherein the data represented by the **first** machine readable code comprises a plurality of data points, at least a first of the plurality of data points included in the **first** machine readable code representing at least the shipping origin of the package and at least a second data point in the **first** machine readable code representing the identification of the transaction;

in response to correlating the item data, transaction data, customer data, and package data with the set of stored business rules specifying how packages are to be shipped from the customer to the returns center, format the return shipping label, such that the return shipping label contains the **first** machine readable code and complies with shipping label specifications of the selected shipping carrier, the **first** machine readable code not associated with the carrier and in addition to a **second** carrier-specified machine readable code also present on the shipping label; and

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, scanning the first machine readable code by the merchant or by the specialized returns center to correlate the first machine readable code with one or more business rules for performing returns processing for the merchant associated with the transaction.

15. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the programming is operable to access at least one of the group of item data, customer data, transaction data, or product data, via a remote data communications link.

16. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the programming is further operable to:

access shipping rate data; and

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, calculate a shipping charge due to the carrier, the shipping charge based on the shipping rate data and the cost of shipping the package from the shipping origin associated with the customer to the merchant or the specialized returns center.

17. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the programming is further operable to:

access carrier center location data; and

use the computer associated with the merchant or the specialized return center to format the return shipping label to include a carrier center location closest to the merchant or the specialized returns center as the shipping destination such that the package is delivered to carrier center location and picked up by the merchant or the specialized returns center.

18. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the carrier center location closest to the merchant or the specialized returns center is a bulk mail center.

19. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the item data identifies an item type.

20. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the item data identifies an item value.

21. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the transaction data is a transaction identifier.

22. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the transaction data is a transaction date.

23. **(Cancelled)**

24. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the customer data represents customer preferences, at least one customer preference comprising a customer-selected choice of carrier, and the software is further operable to:

use the computer operated by the merchant from whom the item was acquired or the specialized returns center associated with the merchant to format the return shipping label as required by the customer-selected choice of carrier.

25. **(Currently Amended)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the customer data identifies the merchant as a payee of shipping costs, and the software is further operable to:

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, scan the first machine readable code by the merchant or by the specialized returns center to identify the merchant as the payee of shipping charges; and

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return and identifying the merchant as the payee of shipping charges, calculate the shipping charge due to the carrier, the shipping charge based on the cost of shipping the package from the shipping origin associated with the customer to the merchant or the specialized returns center.

26. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the package data represents package weight, and the software is further operable to:

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, calculate a shipping charge due to the carrier, the shipping charge based on the package weight and the

cost of shipping the package from the shipping origin associated with the customer to the merchant or the specialized returns center.

27. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 14, wherein the package data represents package size, and the software is further operable to:

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, calculate a shipping charge due to the carrier, the shipping charge based on the package size and the cost of shipping the package from the shipping origin associated with the customer to the merchant or the specialized returns center.

28. **(Previously Presented)** Software for providing merchandise return labels for enabling a customer to ship a package containing one or more items previously acquired from a merchant during a unique transaction, the software embodied in a memory and comprising programming operable when executed by a computer to:

access item data representing at least one detail about the item;

access transaction data representing at least one detail including an identification of the transaction associated with the item;

access customer data representing at least one detail about a customer associated with the transaction including a shipping origin;

correlate the item data, customer data, and transaction data with a set of stored business rules to determine coding to be printed on a shipping label; wherein the set of stored business rules specify how packages are to be shipped from the customer to the returns center and represent guidelines for determining a selected shipping carrier, a shipping destination, and a shipping class or rate for shipment from the customer to the returns center;

in response to correlating the item data, customer data, and transaction data with the set of stored business rules specifying how packages are to be shipped, generate a **first** machine readable code for the return shipping label for shipment from the customer to the returns center, wherein the data represented by the **first** machine readable code at least the shipping origin of the package and at least a second data point in the **first** machine readable code representing the identification of the transaction;

in response to correlating the item data, customer data, and transaction data with the set of stored business rules specifying how packages are to be shipped from the customer to the returns center, format the return shipping label, such that the return shipping label contains the **first** machine readable code and complies with shipping label specifications of the selected shipping carrier, the **first** machine readable code not associated with the carrier and in addition to a **second** carrier-specified machine readable code also present on the shipping label; and

in response to receiving the package containing the item for return, scanning the **first** machine readable code by the merchant or by the specialized returns center to correlate the **first** machine readable code with one or more business rules for performing returns processing for the merchant associated with the transaction.

29. **(Cancelled)**

30. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 28, wherein the programming is further operable to access package data representing at least one detail about the package in which the item is expected to be shipped, and to further correlate package data with the business rules.

31. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 28, wherein the shipping parameters further may comprise choice of carrier.

32. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 28, wherein the shipping parameters further may comprise package disposition.

33. **(Currently Amended)** The method of Claim 1, wherein:

the specialized return center receives returns for and provides returns processing for a plurality of merchants;

the transaction data further comprises identification of the merchant;

at least a third of the plurality of data points included in the first machine readable code representing the identification of the merchant; and

the method further comprises scanning the first machine readable code by the specialized returns center in response to receiving the package containing the item for return to identify the merchant associated with the transaction.

34. **(Currently Amended)** The software of Claim 14, wherein:

the specialized return center receives returns for and provides returns processing for a plurality of merchants;

the transaction data further comprises identification of the merchant;

at least a third of the plurality of data points included in the first machine readable code represents the identification of the merchant; and

the programming is further operable to scan the first machine readable code by the specialized returns center in response to receiving the package containing the item for return to identify the merchant associated with the transaction.

35. **(Currently Amended)** The software of Claim 28, wherein:

the return center receives returns for and provides returns processing for a plurality of merchants;

the transaction data further comprises identification of the merchant;

at least a third of the plurality of data points included in the first machine readable code represents the identification of the merchant; and

the programming is further operable to scan the first machine readable code by the specialized returns center in response to receiving the package containing the item for return to identify the merchant associated with the transaction.

36. **(Currently Amended)** The computer-implemented method of Claim 1, wherein scanning the first machine readable code on the return shipping label results in the identification of the shipping origin of the package and the method further comprises calculating the shipping charge due to the carrier based on the shipping origin identified as a result of scanning the first machine readable code on the return shipping label.

37. **(Currently Amended)** The software of Claim 14, wherein scanning the first machine readable code on the return shipping label results in the identification of the shipping origin of the package and the method further comprises calculating the shipping charge due to the carrier based on the shipping origin identified as a result of scanning the first machine readable code on the return shipping label.

38. (Currently Amended) The software of Claim 28, wherein scanning the first machine readable code on the return shipping label results in the identification of the shipping origin of the package and the method further comprises calculating the shipping charge due to the carrier based on the shipping origin identified as a result of scanning the first machine readable code on the return shipping label.